United Nations E/CN.18/2007/4

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
7 February 2007

Original: English

United Nations Forum on Forests
Seventh session
New York, 16-27 April 2007
Item 5 of the provisional agenda*
Multi-stakeholder dialogue

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Note by the Secretariat

Summary

The participation of representatives of major groups, as identified in Agenda 21, during the thematic sessions of the 2000-2005 multi-year programme of work of the United Nations Forum on Forests has improved significantly over time. In order to build on that progress, the Forum may wish to consider a number of measures, including: promoting the development of associations and networks at the national, regional and international levels; continuing the involvement of stakeholders in expert meetings of the Forum in an open and participatory manner; reconsidering the modalities of the multi-stakeholder dialogue so as to mainstream it into the discussions of the session; and promoting and supporting organization-led initiatives as part of the future multi-year programme of work of the Forum.

In 2007, the multi-stakeholder dialogue will be held over the course of the two-week session. There will be a one and one-half hour session during the first week and a morning session during the second week, during which representatives of major groups will present their discussion papers and share their perspectives on the negotiation of a non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests and on the next multi-year programme of work of the Forum.

* E/CN.18/2007/1.

07-23196 (E) 220207

I. Introduction

1. The present note has been prepared to facilitate the multi-stakeholder dialogue at the seventh session of the United Nations Forum on Forests. Discussion papers prepared by the focal points of the major groups in consultation with their networks are contained in addenda to the present note.

2. From 2000 to 2005, the Forum made significant progress in enhancing the contribution of major groups, as identified in Agenda 21, to its work. Thematic sessions provided an opportunity to learn from the experience of major group representatives in the field, while their participation in the official sessions and the ad hoc expert group meetings and country-led initiatives increased significantly. Building on that progress and providing more meaningful opportunities for the engagement of stakeholders in the work of the Forum in the future will be important issues for consideration in the new multi-year programme of work of the Forum, to be adopted at the seventh session. The present note seeks to provide some recommendations in that regard.

3. Pursuant to its resolution 1/1, the Forum holds a multi-stakeholder dialogue at every session. The Forum secretariat facilitates consultations with the focal points of each major group[1] to plan and prepare for the multi-stakeholder dialogue. The secretariat has worked closely with the focal points to enhance their participation in accordance with resolution 1/1 and the rules of procedure of the Economic and Social Council. The format and content of the dialogue is proposed by the focal points, in consultation with the Forum secretariat, to the Bureau of the Forum for consideration.

4. In resolution 1/1, the Forum stated that the transparent and participatory practices established by the Commission on Sustainable Development should provide the basis for major group participation in the Forum. Taking into account the development of stakeholder participation in the Commission and the decisions taken at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the Forum may wish to consider ways to enhance direct and substantive involvement of international organizations and major groups in its work.

II. Enhancing stakeholder participation in the future work of the Forum

5. In order for major group representatives to work effectively with an intergovernmental process that is restricted by both financial resources and time, groups must be able to organize associations and networks. Such networks serve the dual purpose of promoting capacity-building and the exchange of experiences among members, and developing a group perspective based on common concerns, which can then be transmitted to the Forum. While some major groups currently benefit from the existence of such networks, there is considerable room for improvement. For example, the primary constraint in engaging the local authorities major group is precisely a lack of an appropriate network that could contribute on behalf of a range of members. The Member States may wish to consider promoting

[1] A complete list of the focal points of major groups is available at www.un.org/esa/forests/contacts-major_groups.html.

and supporting the development of such networks at the national, regional and international levels.

6. Representatives of major groups have contributed significantly to the work of the ad hoc expert groups convened as part of the multi-year programme of work for the period 2000-2005. Their proposals and comments on the various issues under consideration were submitted for discussion in an open and participatory manner alongside those of other experts. Such a practice should be continued in the future, including during the intersessional activities of the Forum, such as the proposed intergovernmental expert group meetings for the consideration of the implementation of a non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests.

7. In addition, the positive experience gained from such expert group meetings could be used in reconsidering the modalities of the multi-stakeholder dialogue at future sessions. Both Member States and representatives of major groups have expressed their concerns regarding what is currently considered a static method of participation. Dialogue could be used more effectively in incorporating the views and priorities of stakeholders into the discussions of the Forum itself. Giving stakeholders a more open and participatory role may be one way of mainstreaming the dialogue throughout the session.

8. One example of such enhanced participation can be drawn from the lessons learned by the General Assembly through the work of the Ad Hoc Committee on a Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities. In order to ensure that decisions taken in the context of the Convention would reflect the needs and concerns of the stakeholders affected by them, the Committee decided to invite representatives of civil society organizations to participate in its work as experts, and called upon such experts throughout negotiations when expert advice or opinion was required. The Forum could also consider inviting representatives of major groups to participate in the work of the Forum as experts at each of its future sessions.

9. Major groups have convened several very successful organization-led initiatives in past years to contribute substantively to discussions on such issues as the root causes of deforestation, traditional forest-related knowledge and the gender aspects of sustainable forest management. Such initiatives provided the opportunity to consider in-depth analyses, positive experiences and obstacles faced in implementing the decisions taken by the Forum. Major groups should be encouraged to continue this practice in the future. Specific reference to organization-led initiatives of interest to the work of the Forum could also be incorporated into the formal multi-year programme of work, as is done in some regional intergovernmental processes, such as the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe.

III. Multi-stakeholder dialogue at the seventh session of the Forum

10. The multi-stakeholder dialogue will be spread over the two weeks of the seventh session. It will begin with a 90-minute session during the first week, which will provide major group representatives the opportunity to present the findings set

out in their discussion papers, as well as their preliminary views on a non-legally binding instrument and the multi-year programme of work. Another three-hour session will be provided during the second week, during which representatives will be invited to discuss the progress of the negotiations with Member States. Major group representatives will also be invited to present their views and comments throughout the negotiations at the discretion of the Chair and presiding Vice-Chairs.

IV. Points for discussion

11. In considering the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests and the multi-year programme of work for the Forum, Member States may wish to:

- **Consider promoting and supporting the development of networks and associations of major groups, as identified in Agenda 21.**
- **Consider continuing the practice of involving stakeholders in ad hoc expert groups in an open and participatory manner during the future work of the Forum and consider using the same practice in the proposed intergovernmental expert group meetings, which will serve to evaluate implementation of the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests.**
- **Re-evaluate the modalities of the multi-stakeholder dialogue and consider ways of mainstreaming it into discussion at future sessions of the Forum, taking into account the lessons learned by other forums.**
- **Consider the inclusion of organization-led initiatives of interest into the multi-year programme of work of the Forum.**